

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Introduction

Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come (Mt. 12:31-32).

Moses E. Lard wrote: “Few passages in the New Testament have led to more inquiry than this; and few have obtained less satisfactory answers. It has long been the subject of much dreamy thought, much loose talk, and much idle conjecture” (*Lard’s Quarterly*, Vol. I, p.266).

1. This passage was “the talk of the town” in past years, but it is not so much now. Why the difference? Possible Reasons: Less Bible study, slackened spiritual-mindedness, influence of Postmodernism on one’s inability to know truth, pride of station (I already know it!), influence of materialism in seen less true concern about self.
2. Relevant questions concerning the topic arise.
 - A. What is this sin?
 - B. Is there a specific sin which is unpardonable?
 - C. Can people today commit this sin?
 - D. Am I guilty of the sin?
3. Our principal texts for consideration are these:
 - A. Matthew 12:22-32
 - B. Mark 3:20-30
 - C. Luke 11:14-23
 - D. Luke 12:8-12
4. An Overview of Our Study
 - A. A Brief Comparison-Contrast in Analysis of These Passages
 - B. Focusing on the Meaning of Blasphemy
 - C. Various Positions on Blasphemy
 - D. Focusing on the Holy Spirit’s Role
 - E. A Summary of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
 - F. Similar Attitude Reflected in Other Passages

I. A Brief Analysis of These Passages (Comparison-Contrast)

- A. Matthew 12 provides the fullest account here used.
1. Jesus' miracle of casting out the demon by the Spirit
 2. The Pharisees' charge *against Jesus*: acting by Satan's power
 3. Jesus' refutation of their charge by using three illustrations (Divided kingdom/city; their own sons by Beelzebub or His power; evidence of the kingdom; binding Satan and casting them out)
 4. Their enmity displayed
 5. Their peril brought about by their rejection of Christ, but they might later go further.
- B. Mark 3 assumes the miracle and then follows somewhat the same pattern as Matthew.
1. The Pharisees' charge *against the Lord*: acting by Satan's power
 2. Jesus' refutation of the charge
 3. The enmity shown in their charges
 4. Their resulting peril, because hearts rejected Him
 5. The reason underlying their opposition to Jesus.
- C. Luke 11 presents Jesus' miracle and the ensuing conversation between Jesus and His opponents.
1. It provides little new or particularly significant in view of the other accounts.
 2. It omits the Savior's warning about guilt and the unpardonable sin.
 3. Its salient features used by Jesus in developing his argument with the Pharisees are also included in the other accounts of our study.
- D. Luke 12, on the other hand, does contribute something different in the immediate context of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees.
1. Luke 12:10 is the one verse which is part of Matthew and Mark's accounts.

And every one who shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven.

2. The context of this one verse seems especially important, because it is quite different from the context of this same statement in the other accounts in Matthew and Mark.
 - a. Preceding this verse is Jesus' statement about confessing and denying him before men (8-9).
 - b. Following this verse is Jesus' consolation to His disciples about their being confronted by authorities over their teaching (11-12).
 - c. It is clear that the contextual emphasis of this paragraph is apostolic preaching and its effects upon people: first, upon hearers (confession or denial of Christ); and then, upon the rulers pressuring the apostles in the environment of first-century preaching and practice.
 - d. This question logically arises: Why did he insert the statement about speaking against him or the Holy Spirit between the reaction of men toward Jesus and toward the Gospel? (Notice the parallel/interchangeable nature of these verbs in the two statements in the verse: "*speak a word against the Son of man*" and

“*blasphemeth* against the Holy Spirit.”)

3. Conclusion: Jesus here used the statement concerning blaspheming/speaking a word against the Spirit because to do so was to oppose, hinder, suppress the work of the Spirit in the same way as those who would speak against the miracle of Jesus worked by the power of the Holy Spirit. Opposition to the teaching of the Spirit displayed by impenitent hearts in blatant attacks, in other words, would be equally blasphemous to the Spirit. While they blasphemed Jesus with their charge concerning His miracle, He warned them about the later and more perilous blasphemy which they later might commit against the Spirit. The former was forgivable, but the latter was not.
4. If this conclusion is correct, it is imperative for some to re-think their position that such blasphemy is no longer possible simply because the miracles of Jesus are not now performed. The same blatant opposition hurled *against Jesus* by slandering the Holy Spirit’s evidence in the form of the miracle of exorcizing demons can likewise be shown *against the Spirit’s Word*; and opposition to one, if settled and final, is as dangerous as such opposition to the other.

II. The Meaning of Blasphemy

- A. Blasphemy (*blasphemia*) - Speaking against, maligning, harming, rejecting defiantly in word or in action; Num. 15:30-31 illustrates the use of the word in depicting *action* which achieves the same ends as defiant, harmful speech. It involved intentional sin, committed defiantly, because one “despised the word of the Lord,” and is classified as blasphemy.
- B. “Every sin and blasphemy” & “speaks a word against” (Mt. 12:31,32, and as seen also in Luke 12:9-10) are parallel in meaning.
- C. They accused Jesus of acting by Satan’s power, thus blaspheming Him.
- D. They demonstrated the wrong attitude by their words of reviling to Jesus. In Mark 3:30 Mark seems to have added the Lord’s reason for warning the scribes about their blasphemy becoming more fatal than it already was.
- E. What we have here is a case of some who have become progressively worse, culminating in their complete rejection of the Holy Spirit’s miraculous evidence of Jesus’ deity and messiahship in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 (blasphemy against Christ), and the anticipated complete rejection of His apostles’ teaching of Christ, directed by the Holy Spirit, in Luke 12 (blasphemy against the Spirit).
- F. They did not speak unwittingly, but deliberately out of their envy to harm/discredit Jesus.
- G. Because the Spirit is the agent of divine revelation, to blaspheme Him now is to blaspheme/slander/malign/reject God’s final attempt to effect repentance through the Gospel of Christ, leaving us no other means of salvation.

III. Various Positions on Blasphemy

- A. The following positions have been held concerning what constitutes blasphemy against the Spirit. Those lacking contextual support will be so labeled (Not in Context = NIC), because they must be injected into the context by the practice of “eisegesis,” not exegesis. For this reason, little time will be given to answering them.
- B. Eight Different Positions
1. Taking the Lord’s name in vain - NIC
 2. Adultery, murder, backsliding, deathbed repentance, or some other heinous sin - NIC
 3. Post-baptismal sins (Origen) - NIC
 4. Attempt to achieve meritorious righteousness - NIC
 5. Impossible for the Christian (Calvinism) - NIC
 6. Unbelief in a former believer (Arminianism) - NIC
 7. Attributing the miracles of Jesus to Satan, thus impossible for anyone today - easiest position if all accounts are not considered, but untenable, in view of Luke’s contextual focus on rejection of apostolic preaching; contrary to the total context of the expression
 8. Post-Pentecost rejection of the Spirit
 - a. This position conforms to the context.
 - b. Beginning on Pentecost the Spirit came, as promised by Jesus, to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, leading them to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Messiah (Jn. 16:8-14). Rejection of His message or His evidence given in proof of the message *could* involve one in blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
 - c. It is possible today by completely rejecting the Spirit’s testimony in the Scriptures (Lk. 12:8-12), which is just another way of maliciously and deliberately rejecting the Spirit, during His “age,” called by Jesus “the age to come” in Matthew 12:32.
 - d. The “age of the Spirit” is the Gospel Dispensation, in which the Holy Spirit plays the preeminent role in delivering divine revelation by revealing it to the apostles and prophets and validating it through miracles (Jn. 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; 1 Pet. 1:12; Mk. 16:19-20; Heb. 2:3-4). Even after His work of revelation was completed, rejection of His revelation was tantamount to rejection of Him.
 - e. After Pentecost there was no other possible resort when the Scriptures were repudiated with finality (Son had already completed His work; Spirit was then glorifying Christ, Jn. 16:14). “If the Holy Spirit is rejected, there are no other heavenly means for man’s salvation. The Holy Spirit dispensation is the last; a rejection of the Holy Spirit is a rejection of heaven” (Boles, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 159).

IV. The Holy Spirit’s Role in Focus

- A. The Spirit worked before Pentecost in the prophets and in Christ. Blasphemy against

Christ was no less sinful than blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but the former was not final (was temporary) while the latter was final (thus permanent). Those who rejected the prophets had other opportunities, even the ones blaspheming the Son of Man. Jews were forgiven on Pentecost because their rejection of Christ was not final. There was additional evidence through the Spirit to convict them.

- B. Beginning on Pentecost the Spirit performed His final work in the apostles and prophets. When people rejected their Spirit-given message (rendering His work null and void), they turned their backs on God's final attempt to save them, with no other message/messenger to be offered. Paul was pardoned after Pentecost because his rejection was not final (1 Tim. 1:13).
- C. Such blasphemy against the Spirit, while no more sinful than such against Christ, was *more serious* in that it involved a repudiation of a final offer. It becomes a dispensational matter similar to the "better thing" bestowed by Christ in the Gospel in Hebrews 11:40.
- C. Final rejection of God's way of salvation in Christ through the Gospel was a deliberate, malicious repudiation, leaving no room for repentance, thus an eternal sin because of its permanence.

V. A Summary of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

- A. The Holy Spirit, as the divine agent of revelation, is here identified because of His part in miraculously revealing and confirming the Word of truth as taught by Jesus and His apostles. He showed God's way of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- B. We encounter an instance of *metonymy* here, as the Spirit is in this role as the cause is to the effect or as the agent is to his work. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to blaspheme (hinder, harm, or discredit) His work, in respect to either the miracle He empowered apostles to work, as Jews did against Jesus in Matthew 12, or the Word He caused His messengers to speak, as in Luke 12.
- C. Because the Gospel of Christ was God's final testimony to an unbelieving world following Pentecost, rejection of the Spirit's testimony left no other saving message for anyone.
- D. When people intentionally and finally rejected this final message out of a stubborn heart, they could never be forgiven.

VI. Some Similar Situations in Other Passages

- A. There are some other passages which deal with similar situations, though they do not speak of "blasphemy against the Spirit."
- B. Hebrews 6:4-6
 1. We have an inspired warning against complete apostasy in this passage. Its role in

it this passage is that of a reason why (*gar*) the Hebrew Christians being addressed needed to continue their spiritual progress. Being remiss to grow placed them in the way of danger, because falling away from adherence to the New Covenant meant there was nothing God could offer to revive them spiritually. He had already offered earlier in the rejected benefits in these verses:

- a. Holy Spirit (metonymy for His effects, blessings) - His fellowship refused in their spiritual lapse
 - b. The good Word of God - experienced as good but abandoned in their unbelief
 - c. Powers of the age to come - Spirit's miraculous work in revelation and confirmation or the benefits of the Gospel of Christ
 - d. God's Son - crucified afresh and shamed in their rejection
2. It is impossible to renew them to repentance after they depart to the degree here indicated in verse 6, because they will not repent. They have gone so far that they have acted in common with those who crucified Jesus and shamed Him before the world. The same power of the Gospel remains and the same power to pardon is the Lord's, but these they had rejected. These verses do not describe any inadequacy on God's part, but focus on the hardened hearts of those who have refused the kind offers of the Spirit's fellowship. Such hearts are impossible to re-invigorate.

C. Hebrews 10:26-31

1. Verses 19-25 are designed to support the faithful endurance of these Christians, so they not draw back into perdition but believe to the saving of the soul. The failure to assemble does not constitute the willful sin of verse 26; but such gatherings would help to avoid such sinning.
2. The willful sin comes close, if it is not identical to it, to being like the sin of chapter six just considered. It comes after truth is known and rejected.
3. There is no other sacrifice available for sin when one has so defiantly disgraced the Son of God and the Spirit of grace as verse 29 describes. Surely the apostasy of this verse comes from a heart so hardened as to remain beyond the appeal of the Gospel. It is not that God cannot influence them, but they will not accept His gracious influences. Remember that "God does not circumvent the faculties of His creatures."

D. 1 John 5:16-17

1. In a context where confidence in prayer's efficacy is taught, John inserts one time when there should be no such confidence, because prayer would then be useless.
2. The sinning pictured in verse 16 is a habitual practice of sin— no particular sin, any sin. It is said to be a "sin unto death" or one "leading to death" (NKJB). The idea could be that the person engages repeatedly in the sinful practice for the rest of his life. He does not repent or attempt to recover himself from Satan's snare. John adds, "I do not say that he should pray about that." In such a case of impenitence, prayer would not avail anything. Spiritual death is this one's state until physical death.

3. On the other hand, if a brother sins, but “not leading to death,” John urges, “He shall ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.”
4. Such a time when one keeps on sinning, repenting not, God can still forgive; but the brother is unwilling to repent. His state evidently has become like the one in the two chapters in Hebrews. I see little difference between them and the one in 1 John 5. In fact, all of them resemble the state of heart of the blasphemer in the early part of our study.
5. McGarvey thought that this sin discussed by John was the same as blasphemy against the Spirit. He might have been correct in his judgment.

Conclusion

1. Any interpretation of a passage must harmonize with truth in the nearer and the remote contexts of the Bible. Even if it does harmonize, its explanation might not be the correct one for that passage; but it will not lead astray from truth.
2. In this study we have tried to establish what seems to be a reasonable explanation for the passages involved with the topic being considered. If we have missed it, at least we have not taught anything so different that it will lead anyone astray from truth. What we have taught has already been taught in other passages of the New Testament, as demonstrated.
3. This is the safe way, and safety must rule when souls are involved.

Works to Consult for Further Study

Alive in the Spirit, Jimmy Jividen, p. 99-108.

A Commentary on Matthew and Mark, J.W. McGarvey, on the relevant passages.

The Gospel of Matthew, Kenneth Chumbley, on the relevant passage.

The Holy Spirit: His Personality, Nature, Works, H. Leo Boles, p. 155-162.

Lard's Quarterly, Moses E. Lard, Vol. I, p. 266-270.

New Testament Commentaries (Gospel Advocate): Matthew (H. Leo Boles), Mark (C.E.W. Dorris), and Luke (H. Leo Boles), on the relevant passages. David Lipscomb's comments from his articles are often included in brackets.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, p. 107-108 (“Little Kittel”).

Truth Commentaries on relevant passages: Kyle Pope (Matthew), L.A. Stauffer (Mark), Colly Caldwell (Luke).

Various Lexicons.

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